

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Steve Lester,	)	C/A No. 3:14-3625-TMC-TER
	)	
Plaintiff,	)	
	)	
vs.	)	
	)	REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
Michael Henthorne of Littler Mendelson PC,	)	
	)	
Defendant.	)	

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This is a civil action filed *pro se* by a state prison inmate. Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §636(b)(1), and District of South Carolina Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2)(e), this magistrate judge is authorized to review all pretrial matters in such *pro se* cases and to submit findings and recommendations to the district court. *See* 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e); 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal).

**INITIAL REVIEW**

Under established local procedure in this judicial district, a careful review has been made of Plaintiff's *pro se* complaint filed in this case. This review has been conducted pursuant to the procedural provisions of 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915, 1915A, and the Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1996, and in light of the following precedents: *Denton v. Hernandez*, 504 U.S. 25 (1992); *Neitzke v. Williams*, 490 U.S. 319, 324-25 (1989); *Haines v. Kerner*, 404 U.S. 519 (1972); *Nasim v. Warden, Md. House of Corr.*, 64 F.3d 951 (4th Cir. 1995); *Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d 70 (4th Cir. 1983); *Boyce v. Alizaduh*, 595 F.2d 948 (4th Cir. 1979).

*Pro se* complaints are held to a less stringent standard than those drafted by attorneys,

*Gordon v. Leeke*, 574 F.2d 1147, 1151 (4th Cir. 1978), and a federal district court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a *pro se* litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case. *Erickson v. Pardus*, 551 U.S. 89, 94 (2007). When a federal court is evaluating a *pro se* complaint, the Plaintiff's allegations are assumed to be true. *De'Lonta v. Angelone*, 330 F. 3d 630, 630n.1 (4th Cir. 2003). Nevertheless, the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that this court can ignore a clear failure in the pleading to allege facts which set forth a claim currently cognizable in a federal district court. *Weller v. Dep't of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387, 391 (4th Cir. 1990). Even under this less stringent standard, the complaint filed in this case is subject to summary dismissal under the provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B).

### **DISCUSSION**

Steve B. Lester (“Plaintiff”) alleges that Defendant, Michael Henthorne, an attorney now employed with Littler Mendelson, was ineffective in his appointed role as Plaintiff’s PCR counsel (back in 1999). Plaintiff seeks damages and a new trial on his state convictions.

This action is filed pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, which provides a private cause of action for constitutional violations by persons acting under color of state law. Section 1983 “ ‘is not itself a source of substantive rights,’ but merely provides ‘a method for vindicating federal rights elsewhere conferred.’” *Albright v. Oliver*, 510 U.S. 266, 271, 114 S.Ct. 807, 127 L.Ed.2d 114 (1994) (quoting *Baker v. McCollan*, 443 U.S. 137, 144 n. 3, 99 S.Ct. 2689, 61 L.Ed.2d 433 (1979)). Accordingly, a civil action under § 1983 allows “a party who has been deprived of a federal right under the color of state law to seek relief.” *City of Monterey v. Del Monte Dunes at Monterey, Ltd.*, 526 U.S. 687, 707, 119 S.Ct. 1624, 143 L.Ed.2d 882 (1999).

Section 1983 provides, in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or any person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress ...

42 U.S.C. § 1983. To establish a claim under § 1983, a Plaintiff must prove two elements: (1) that the Defendant “deprived [the Plaintiff] of a right secured by the Constitution and laws of the United States;” and (2) that the defendant “deprived [the Plaintiff] of this constitutional right under color of [State] statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage.” *Mentavlos v. Anderson*, 249 F.3d 301, 310 (4th Cir.2001) (third alteration in original) (citation and internal quotation marks omitted).

After careful review and consideration, this Court cannot exercise its federal question jurisdiction to consider Plaintiff's allegations against his court-appointed PCR counsel, Defendant Henthorne, pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983. As noted, in order to state a claim for damages under § 1983, an aggrieved party must sufficiently allege that he was injured by “the deprivation of any [of his or her] rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the [United States] Constitution and laws” by a “person” acting “under color of state law.” See 42 U.S.C. § 1983; *Monroe v. Page*, 365 U.S. 167, 81 S.Ct. 473, 5 L.Ed.2d 492 (1961); *see generally* 5 Charles Alan Wright & Arthur R. Miller, Federal Practice and Procedure § 1230 (2002). Defendant Henthorne, a court-appointed attorney representing Plaintiff at a PCR hearing, did not act under color of state law in connection with his legal representation of Plaintiff, and, as a result, Plaintiff's Complaint fails to state a viable § 1983 claim against Defendant Henthorne. An attorney, whether retained, court-appointed, or a public defender, does not act under color of state law, which is a jurisdictional prerequisite for any civil action brought under 42 U.S.C. § 1983. *See Deas v. Potts*, 547 F.2d 800 (4th Cir.1976) (private attorney); *Hall v. Quillen*, 631 F.2d 1154, 1155–56 (4th Cir.1980) (court-appointed attorney); *Polk*

*County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 317–24, 102 S.Ct. 445, 70 L.Ed.2d 509 (1981) (public defender); see also *Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co.*, 457 U.S. 922, 936, 102 S.Ct. 2744, 73 L.Ed.2d 482 (1982) (“Careful adherence to the ‘state action’ requirement ... also avoids imposing on the State, its agencies or officials, responsibility for conduct for which they cannot fairly be blamed.”). Since no other potential basis for this Court’s exercise of federal question or diversity jurisdiction is shown on the face of Plaintiff’s Complaint, this case should be summarily dismissed.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the foregoing, it is recommended that the District Court dismiss the Complaint in this case without prejudice and without issuance and service of process. See *Denton v. Hernandez*; *Neitzke v. Williams*; *Haines v. Kerner*; *Brown v. Briscoe*, 998 F.2d 201, 202–04 (4th Cir.1993); *Boyce v. Alizaduh*; *Todd v. Baskerville*, 712 F.2d at 74; see also 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)(B); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (as soon as possible after docketing, district courts should review prisoner cases to determine whether they are subject to summary dismissal).

Plaintiff’s attention is directed to the important notice on the next page.

s/ Thomas E. Rogers, III  
Thomas E. Rogers, III  
United States Magistrate Judge

September 30, 2014  
Florence, South Carolina

**Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation**

The parties are advised that they may file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation with the District Judge. Objections must specifically identify the portions of the Report and Recommendation to which objections are made and the basis for such objections. “[I]n the absence of a timely filed objection, a district court need not conduct a de novo review, but instead must ‘only satisfy itself that there is no clear error on the face of the record in order to accept the recommendation.’” *Diamond v. Colonial Life & Acc. Ins. Co.*, 416 F.3d 310 (4th Cir. 2005) (quoting Fed. R. Civ. P. 72 advisory committee’s note).

Specific written objections must be filed within fourteen (14) days of the date of service of this Report and Recommendation. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72(b); *see* Fed. R. Civ. P. 6(a), (d). Filing by mail pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 5 may be accomplished by mailing objections to:

Robin L. Blume, Clerk  
United States District Court  
Post Office Box 2317  
Florence, South Carolina 29503

**Failure to timely file specific written objections to this Report and Recommendation will result in waiver of the right to appeal from a judgment of the District Court based upon such Recommendation.** 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); *Thomas v. Arn*, 474 U.S. 140 (1985); *Wright v. Collins*, 766 F.2d 841 (4th Cir. 1985); *United States v. Schronce*, 727 F.2d 91 (4th Cir. 1984).